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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1276
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4814
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8364
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5926
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3813
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1750
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000481

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: NGOS REPORT SUCCESS BUT EMPHASIZE THE
EMERGENCY IS NOT OVER

REF: A. RANGOON 471

[1](#)B. RANGOON 468

[1](#)C. RANGOON 448

[1](#)D. RANGOON 400

Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. Over 70 NGOs are now actively engaged in disaster relief efforts, employing several thousand staff, including over 1,000 international aid workers, and report success in delivering aid to many survivors of Cyclone Nargis, meeting a range of needs. However, they stress that the Delta remains in a state of emergency. NGOs still face many hurdles. They face difficulties in finding experienced local staff. Despite assurances to the contrary, the GOB continues to place onerous restrictions and procedures on NGOs, delaying travel to the Delta, which threatens getting aid to cyclone victims quickly and efficiently. Close relationships with individuals and GOB ministries help navigate GOB restrictions, an advantage newcomer NGOs to Burma lack.

SUCSESSES

[1](#)2. (U) NGOs active in the Delta report success in bringing relief to Cyclone Nargis survivors. Over 70 NGOs are now actively engaged in disaster relief efforts, employing several thousand staff, including over 1,000 international aid workers. Aid matches needs from a wide variety of sectors, including Water and Sanitation Food, Nutrition, Health, Shelter, Child Protection, Education and Livelihood. Most NGOs are currently in the process of preparing and giving out household and shelter kits in addition to their ongoing activities of distributing water and food.

Save the Children's (SC) Director Andrew Kirkwood said they have reached over 350,000 affected persons with aid so far. Much of their supplies they received from USAID/OFDA consignment flights delivered by U.S. military C-130s. SC has over 300 staff in the Delta and are in the process of recruiting approximately 1,000 more. They are working in all fifteen of the worst-hit townships, and have local offices in

all townships but Bogale. SC aims to distribute 70,000 household kits, and indicates that the U.S. air bridge is key to their success.

¶3. (U) Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) have over 200 local staff who serve eight camps in Labutta and Myaung Mya townships. As the only NGO with permission to access the remote Pyin Sa Lu islands in Labutta township, ADRA provides a range of aid to survivors there with the aid of fifteen Zodiac boats from USAID/OFDA delivered by the C-130s. Five mobile-medical team boats and two water filtration boats travel between the islands. ADRA distributes 3,000 bags of rice a day to survivors there. In addition, ADRA is building 1,600 latrines and 4,200 washbasins, and are cleaning and desalinating 650 wells.

¶4. (U) UK NGO Merlin has six international staff, over 340 local staff including a team of over 240 community health workers serving in Labutta township. Merlin medical boats consist of a team of mobile medical health workers who visit remote villages. World Vision employs 563 local staff and plans to hire 400 more.

THE EMERGENCY IS NOT OVER

¶5. (C) A common refrain of the NGOs we met with was that the Delta remained in a state of emergency. While GOB officials claim to be in a "post emergency rescue period," moving on to a recovery phase, NGOs disagree. Kirkwood stated "clearly the immediate relief is not finished," citing communities

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that have still not seen any aid yet. World Food Program (WFP) helicopters have finally reached remote villages this week that had received only a trickle of aid. ADRA's Bureau Chief Frank Teeuwen emphasizes "the emergency is nowhere near completed." A clearer picture will emerge of the immediate and long term needs of cyclone survivors in the Delta following initial reporting of the Tripartite Core Group's (TCG) assessment, expected on June 24. (Ref B & C)

HURDLES

¶6. (C) Many NGOs we spoke with point to travel restriction as the major roadblock to providing relief facing international staff. GOB ministries delay approvals until the last minute and mishandle applications. SC reports that of the seventeen travel requests they have submitted only eight have been approved so far, with requests often approved the day before the trip is scheduled. They have six travel requests still pending. SC has not had any travel requests denied, though the Department of Social Welfare (SC's line ministry) has reportedly lost three of SC's applications. Merlin Acting Director Robert Bowdridge reported that getting a three-month pass to Labutta took only a few days prior to the cyclone. Following the cyclone, however, he waited a month before finally receiving permission to visit another region in the disaster area. On the other hand, Teeuwen reports ADRA has no problems whatsoever in obtaining travel permits citing strong relationships with the Ministry of Health (MOH). As a result of delays and interruptions to travel permission, NGOs rely heavily on locally hired staff to coordinate and distribute aid in the field. NGO World Vision (WV) has designed their programs around local staff in response to these travel restrictions.

¶7. (SBU) Procuring experienced Burmese staff is a growing difficulty for NGOs. NGOs have long relied on local staff due to GOB suspicion of foreigners, so have larger local staffs than elsewhere. All the NGOs we talked to have begun advertising and using word of mouth to increase their staffing in the Delta. NGOs salaries attract qualified candidates in Burma's stagnant economy, but NGOs still face difficulties hiring enough experienced applicants. SC

relates instances where staff avoided villages because they "didn't have enough food for everyone"; an experienced worker would have visited anyway to assess needs. ADRA, meanwhile, struggles to find financial experts for the field.

18. (C) Enforcement of existing GOB "guiding principles" for NGO and humanitarian work (Ref A) would further hinder relief efforts, although most say their operations have not been affected yet. Bowdridge commented "if we have to follow these guidelines to the letter, things will come to a standstill" and predicted mounting frustration among donors and NGOs. Several NGOs told us that it was too early to tell whether the practical application of these guidelines will hamper aid work. Brian Agland, Director of the NGO CARE reported that their line ministry was not even aware of the new guidelines. UNICEF Country Representative Ramesh Shrestha told us that since the announcement of the "guiding principles" on June 10, UNICEF has not encountered any problems taking receipt of or delivering consigned relief supplies to the delta, including those supplies delivered by US C-130s. Save the Children and UNDP commented that they have not applied for travel permission or visas since June 10, but said their staff in the field continued to travel and operate unhindered. Two embassy officers received permission to travel to the delta on June 12, four days after they applied. Nonetheless, the aid agencies and NGOs we spoke with noted they were discussing contingencies in the event the GOB began strictly enforcing these regulations.

19. (C) NGOs working in food aid report being questioned by GOB entities on their method of changing money. One NGO reported being advised to exchange money at an official government rate of 6 Kyats per 1 US\$ instead of the black

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market rate of 1145 Kyats per 1 US\$. (Note: virtually nobody in Burma uses the artificially low official exchange rate). A WFP representative remarked that if official government rates of exchange are enforced, they may as well "close up shop."

ESTABLISHED RELATIONSHIPS A BASIS FOR SUCCESS

110. (C) All the NGOs we met credit the success they have had in distributing aid and accessing the Delta to relationships cultivated through their longstanding presence in Burma. Teeuwen credits ADRA's friendly relations with the MOH as explanation for their ease in gaining access to the Delta. SC credits local connections that enabled them to reach as many as 30,000 people with aid by only the third day after the cyclone. Businessmen considered regime cronies have also supported access for NGOs to deliver aid (Ref D). Population Services International (PSI) runs Sun Clinics, medical clinics offering health care in rural areas. Already operational in Rangoon and through the Delta, health professionals at the Sun Clinics provided immediate treatment, often for free, to cyclone survivors. Bowdridge notes that Merlin's teams of health workers have unfettered access to the Delta, a fact he feels would be impossible without the help of a 'smoother' - a Burmese doctor on their staff with connections to key regime figures, who negotiates their access.

111. (C) The NGO ACTED provides another example of the importance of established relationships. While not present in Burma before the cyclone, the Ministry of Social Welfare promised them permission to work in the delta for two years and even assured ACTED staff they would receive multiple-entry visas. ACTED credits the Burmese Ambassador to France as personally familiar with ACTED, who recommended them to the GOB for entry. Other NGOs, who were not established in Rangoon before May, did not experience as warm a welcome. Teeuwen noted that during a meeting of German NGOs on June 9 several non-established NGOs who do not have

Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with a ministry complained of ongoing challenges in gaining permission to travel the Delta to conduct assessments, much less relief operations.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) While difficult, the challenges facing NGOs working in Burma are not insurmountable. Their work has proved invaluable in supplementing the GOBs inept response to Cyclone Nargis. Established NGOs have a long history of navigating regime restrictions and have forged working relationships that they can now draw on to reach cyclone survivors.

VILLAROSA